

## **Critical African Studies 10.2**

### **Editorial introduction**

This issue of Critical African Studies is compiled from a diverse range of papers, which, while being varied in their theoretical and analytical approaches and geographical contexts, all contribute to the journal's aim of returning Africanist scholarship to the heart of theoretical innovation.

Roxburgh examines how discourses of power play out in 'witch camps' in Northern Ghana, safe spaces for those who have been accused of witchcraft and consequently ostracised and/or threatened with violence within their communities. Exploring a number of discursive categories including "violence", "gender", "empowerment" and "human rights", the author examines the language used by politicians, religious leaders, victims of violence and NGS staff to discuss the problems associated with witchcraft. Roxburgh points out the multiple ways in which actors within a Western NGO can replicate the exclusions and inequalities they seek to work against. Thus, she argues, foreign NGOs working in the witch camps perpetuate a "neo-colonial Westernization" through the imposition of particular aspects of Western modernity on Ghanaian people and spaces. Putting pressure on the Ghanaian state, these agencies erode the autonomy of the government and shape the agendas of local actors in counter-productive ways. The author calls for both international and local NGOs to contest the neo-colonialism that is the product of global values and practices rather than imposing foreign ideas on a local context without due consideration for the latter's own logics and realities.

Three articles take on different South African contexts from specific theoretical and analytical perspectives, with the country's complex entanglement of race, class, politics, cultures, histories and legacies remaining an important focus point within African Studies. De Coninck's article on middle-class labelling in post-apartheid South Africa reflects on how race and class are currently being shaped in South Africa, with a specific focus on the popular notions that black South Africans seeking upward social mobility are either aspiring to whiteness (coconuts), part of a superficial, hyper-consuming class (black diamonds), or both. In an analysis that brings public events and discourses together with interviews, media and social media data, de Coninck shows how contestations over racialised identities and senses of belonging are shaping the middle class in South Africa and generating a landscape of

*intra*-racial difference that contrasts significantly with the apartheid regime's deliberate creation of *inter*-racial boundaries. Writing against the grain of scholarship on South Africa's middle class that tends to be largely economic in focus, this paper opens up the imagined, situated and 'felt' nature of class identities in ways that illuminate important challenges in South African society and that have to do with complex enactments of loyalty and morality.

Mpofu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni closely examine the life and thought of Nelson Mandela, focusing particularly on his famous autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. They challenge critics who see Mandela as having "sold out" by allowing white South Africans to retain their economic and social privilege at the expense of the black majority in the years following the end of apartheid. Unpacking the development of Mandela's philosophy of non-racialism through his life story and political journey, the authors argue that Mandela's politics were founded on a "decolonial humanism" aimed at the shaping of a post-racial society. They take issue with those in contemporary South Africa who now decry this philosophy as 'rainbowism', alluding to Desmond Tutu's description of the country as a "rainbow nation". Rather than "selling out", the authors argue, Mandela's ideas "matured [into] a planetary view of liberation"; he remained true to his principle of non-racialism and, while not perfect, his presidential legacy is one of a more inclusive South African society.

Elshamy's paper takes to task the critics who have claimed that Nobel Prize-winning South African author J. M. Coetzee's apartheid novels are evasively indirect when they comment on injustice in South Africa, with the author's initial favouring of allegory above realism. In his post-apartheid novels there seems to be a shift in Coetzee's mode of writing as he resorts to realism to comment on the political changes in South Africa. Using the novels *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999) as case studies, the author claims that the paradox of Coetzee's apparent shift from allegory to realism could be theoretically illuminated through the use of Coetzee's talk "The Novel Today" as well as postcolonial theorist Edward Said's "Travelling Theory"; with both these texts combining to formulate a theory of authorship whereby Coetzee expresses his concepts of novelistic practice. No study has yet been conducted to provide a theoretically-based explanation for the modification in his mode of writing, as this paper does. Drawing on Said, the author argues that Coetzee's theory travels to different historical circumstances, and in the post-apartheid era experiences significant changes and developments that resulted in a modification of his mode of writing. The article rejects the accusation that this change makes Coetzee an ambivalent writer, in the

light of his rejection of the “orthodox privileging of realism” in the work he produced during apartheid. Through the application of Said’s theory, the author shows that allegory is not a static literary device but has the ability to generate new meanings.

The final two articles take on original critical, theoretical and analytical approaches to studying Nollywood, Nigeria’s prolific video-film industry, thus making important contributions to this growing field of study. Agina’s paper is exploring, through the use of the film *Black November* (Jeta Amata, 2012), whether Nollywood can inspire social change and raise awareness of important social issues. The film represents the conflict over oil in the Niger Delta and alludes to the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. While Nollywood studies have proliferated over the last two decades – studying the video-film phenomenon from industrial, narrative, gendered and other perspectives – audience and reception analysis of Nollywood films, and African cinema more broadly, is rare, an oversight that this paper attempts to address. The bigger question that the paper poses is whether art can contribute to conflict resolution and social reconstruction and reconciliation, particularly in a conflict-ridden area such as the Niger Delta. The study was conducted through focus groups enquiring how successful viewers felt the film is in addressing salient issues in the region’s conflict, and how such activist representations might contribute to a process of change and peace-building. Drawing on Karin Barber and Stuart Hall’s work on audiences and reception, which posits that the activity and creativity of audiences is at once objective and subjective, the paper concludes that one film alone is unable to affect the sort of lasting change sought in the Niger Delta communities, but that it contributes to important conversations for institutional change, the rights of minority groups, and the elimination of environmental injustice.

Makhubu’s paper attempts to trace a lineage between video art, performance art and ‘early’ Nollywood, and thus initiate a conversation about art history and African creative practices. It takes as a starting point the trans-disciplinary approach necessary to study an audio-visual industry rooted in theatre, cinema and television. The paper looks at the entanglements video-film might have with the performance of live art, a view that destabilizes the distinction between art and popular culture in African contexts. The author is particularly interested in the critical questions that early and transitional Nollywood might pose about the spatio-temporal conditions of African art, and the resulting implications for popular aesthetics. The author claims that video-film represents what art history has repressed – a popular agency in creating and formulating modes of being and imagination that question how the African body

is perceived and marks ethnographic radical difference. The intersections of different modes of performance, mediated through theatre and television, make the distinctions between art and popular culture in Africa complex. Thus, rather than being “uneconomic and banal”, the author argues that in Early Nollywood video-film time is contemporaneous with everyday life and can be seen as a socially engaged creative intervention.